

CHARACTERIZATION OF AGROTOURISM ACTIVITY IN MARAMURES AREA

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Abstract. *Rural tourism and agrotourism are presented as a complex economic activities that highlights, through own mechanism, natural values, cultural and spiritual needs of the rural area. Currently tourism demand becomes increasingly obvious for rest and recreation in the rural area, enjoying the beauties of nature, in clean and quiet environment. In order to meet this trend, many tourism organizations, European and even national concern, increasingly, by the organization and institutionalization of tourism in rural areas. Maramures area is undoubtedly one of the most important agrotourist regions of the country, a true open-air ethnographic museum. Wealth preservation of cultural values and traditions do, that this wonderful area to be included on the UNESCO list of cultural values of humanity.*

Key words: *agrotourism, traditions, rural area, accommodation capacity*

INTRODUCTION.

In the northwest of the country, in the Eastern Carpathians we find a large and beautiful valley - Land of Maramures. Old Romanian area with lovely nature, by a rare beauty Maramures County in situated in north of Romania in Nord-Vest Development Region, along with five other counties: Bihor, Bistrita Nasaud, Cluj, Satu Mare and Salaj.

Maramures area is a land of simple things, where was preserved the richness of folk traditions and customs that have survived for centuries, without modernism to make felt his presence in this region. The beauty of traditional rural life, folklore and customs are still preserved today, residents of places keeping intact the traditions, folkloric events of these places as part of rural social life.

MATERIAL AND METHODS.

To conduct this work was done extensive documentation in the field: books, reports, national and regional statistics, strategic development plans and has on base the analysis of economic indicators characterizing tourism activity.

RESULTS AND DICUSSIONS

Rural tourism and agrotourism appear as a necessary therapy for urban population, due to the stress accumulated during the working week, congestion in urban centers and the desire of modern man to relax in a clean, pleasant environment to reasonable prices.

Rural tourism practicing requires the existence of following elements: the existence of a rural area rich in tradition with a beautiful natural environment; interested people to practice such activities; services provided by these people: room and board and the existence of a material base (involving transportation and roadways) and an appropriate legislative framework that supports people for practicing such activities.

In the whole local economy, *rural tourism* is defined as "a form of tourist capitalization of rural areas by exploiting natural resources, cultural and historical values and traditions, agricultural products, branded products with regional identity, and ethnographic and cultural specific designed to meet the needs of consumers in respect of accommodation, food, recreation, entertainment and various services." Rural tourism as a whole includes a wide range of ways of accommodation, activities, events, celebrations, sports and entertainment, all being carried out in a typical rural environment.

Component of rural tourism, agrotourism is a form of tourism that involves an activity organized by the local population of a rural area, with a great emphasis on the natural and human factors. Thus, agrotourism appears as a complex activity, comprising on the one hand, tourism activity itself (accommodation, pension, service, sports, entertainment, etc.) and on the other hand economic activities, especially agriculture practiced by residents of rural areas.

Maramures area appears as a region where habits lied on work, life and celebration were preserved over time. Maramures, place of culture and civilization that has wood made his history, is the place where traditions and popular costume are kept as nowhere else in Romania. Maramures is a huge open-air museum, and the daily life of the village Maramures is a true return in time.

Traditions have a special place in the soul and life of this land and therefore there here each holiday is intense lived. Popular costume is mandatory to the major religious holidays.

Villages from Maramures have a rich cultural heritage, historical and architectural, original lifestyle, scenic landscapes, rich in resources recreation, leisure and treatment, hardworking and hospitable people, who deserve to be known to realize and exploit the values held by Maramures County.

The status of rural tourism development is necessary to be known and analyzed to highlight new perspectives of development of the economic sectors in the region, in accordance with environmental protection for sustainable tourism development.

Rural tourism has developed successfully in Maramures area, due to the existence of well-preserved traditional spiritual values over time. The elements of attraction of the county in rural tourism field are many and special. Traditions and customs, ancient and unspoiled rural life are always present, and the popular costume and the architecture gives it a specific identity. Therefore, the primary element of tourism in Maramures is village life. The identity of Maramures is complemented by built landscape and natural landscape, important elements components of rural area of Maramures.

Analysis of tourist offer in Maramures County

In the analysis of the tourism offer a special importance is given to tourist accommodation establishments, by type of unit and the existing accommodation capacity in operation. Next it will be realised an analysis of economic indicators characterizing the tourist offer.

The number of tourist accommodation structures in Maramures County, had a remarkable evolution in last years, from 146 accommodation units registered in 2006, leading to 196 accommodation units in 2010, the growth rate being about 30.82% but with a lowering trend in the last two years.

In the year 2012, the 171 existing accommodation units existing in Maramures County, represents 23.42% from total establishments of tourist reception with accommodation, ranking on second place on the regional level, after Cluj County with 32.05%. Moreover, the growth of

the number of accommodation units from Maramures is higher to growth rate of accommodation units from all development region.

Regarding the structure of accomodation units, by types, Figure 1, the highest percent is hold by agrotourist households with 45.61% from total of accomodation units.

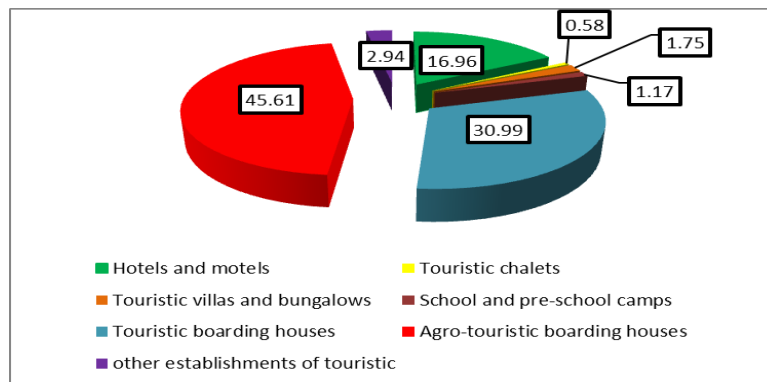


Figure 1. The structure of tourist accommodation establishments, Maramures County, 2012

Table 1.

The number of agrotourist households from Maramures County by localities

	2001	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Maramures County	33	66	87	91	110	112	104	77	78	78
Sighetu Marmatiei	-	2	2	2	2	2	-	-	1	1
Somcuta Mare	1	1	-	-	1	-	-	1	1	1
Barsana	-	2	4	4	4	5	4	6	4	4
Bogdan Voda	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Botiza	9	25	27	26	31	30	26	7	8	8
Budesti	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	2	2	2
Călinești	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Cicarlau	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1
Coltau	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	1	1	1
Copalnic-Manastur	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Desesti	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	3	3	4
Dumbravita	-	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2
Ieud	1	3	4	4	4	4	4	1	1	1
Moisei	1	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3
Ocna Sugatag	1	7	6	8	8	10	12	11	12	14
Oncesti	2	3	5	5	5	5	6	2	2	1
Poienile Izei	1	3	9	10	11	11	7	9	7	7
Recea	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	3	3
Sacalaseeni	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	2	2
Sacel	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2
Sapanta	1	4	6	7	8	8	8	5	5	3
Sieu	-	-	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Sisesti	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Stramtura	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	1	1
Vadu Izei	3	3	3	3	9	9	9	8	8	7
Valea Chioarului	-	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2
Viaeu de Jos	-	-	-	-	2	1	1	2	2	2

Source: <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

Also the development of accommodation units such as pensions - whether urban or agrotourist - was a remarkable one in the period 2004 -2012: from 7 urban pensions recorded in 2004 it reached to 53 urban pensions in year 2012 and from 62 agrotourist households recorded in 2004 it reached to 112 agrotourist households in 2009, with a lowering trend over the last three years, in 2012 reaching 78 units.

In Table 1 is presented the number of agrotourist households from the County of Maramures, by localities. In Ocna Şugatag are recorded the most agrotourist households, 14, representing 14.95% from the total recorded at the County level.

By 2010, Botiza concentrates the largest number of agrotourist households, 30. In recent years there has been a profound reduction of these establishments, 73%, so that in year 2013 only 8 agrotourist households are recorded.

Localities Poienile Izei and Vadu Izei have recorded each 7 agrotourist households in 2013, in both cases we can see a reduction in the number accommodation units with agrotourist profile starting with year 2010.

Not only the number of tourist accommodation structures has registered a positive trend in laste period, but also the existing accommodation capacity (number of seats) and the accommodation capacity in operation (number of seats-days). During 2004-2012 period, the existent accommodation capacity has increased with 75.38% and in operation with 16.30%.

Existing accommodation capacity, in Maramures County, represents 15.41% from total of accommodation places recorded in 2012, at North West Region level. With this value, Maramures County ranks on third place, among components counties of the region's, after, Bihor County with 33.51% and Cluj County 29.08%.

Regarding accommodation capacity in operation, Maramures County owns 16.30% from the existing capacity in operation of the County, occupying the same third position after Cluj with a share of 33.08% and Bihor County with 28,59%.

Table 2.

Capacity of tourist accommodation								
	2004	2005	2006	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Touristic accommodation capacity existing (places)								
North-West Region	24576	26019	26816	26484	27886	26103	28459	30687
Bihor	10591	10455	10552	9984	9746	9152	9718	10284
Bistrita-Nasaud	2915	2660	2705	2728	2689	2626	2752	3101
Cluj	5095	6669	6866	6598	7352	6960	7760	8925
Maramures	2697	2873	3363	3995	4207	4368	4629	4730
Satu Mare	2234	2304	2406	2425	2629	1616	2091	1961
Salaj	1044	1058	924	754	1263	1381	1509	1686
Touristic accommodation in operation (thou places-days)								
North-West Region	6700	7104	7371	7761	7575	8105	8831	9457
Bihor	2940	2577	2429	2532	2262	2355	2613	2704
Bistrita-Nasaud	808	839	835	818	704	719	757	831
Cluj	1659	2032	2247	2316	2303	2589	2858	3128
Maramures	671	977	1199	1455	1440	2564	1570	1542
Satu Mare	368	411	421	431	478	469	585	683
Salaj	254	268	240	208	387	410	446	524

Source: Anuarul Statistic al României

The high percentage of agrotourist guesthouses in accommodation structures is reflected also by the accommodation capacity, having the most accommodation places, like hotels, 1793 places. They hold 37.32% from the total number of existing seats in the region in 2013.

Table 3.

Existing accommodation capacity, Maramures County, places

	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total	2873	3363	3635	3995	4207	4368	4629	4730	4805
Hotels	1544	1711	1752	1670	1851	1827	2086	1831	1793
Hostels	25	25	25	139	152	152	152	192	192
Apartment hotels	0	8	8	8	8	8	0	189	171
Motels	136	139	171	171	146	146	245	99	99
Touristic villas	22	49	50	103	81	83	82	19	19
Touristic chalets	84	98	101	101	17	49	49	311	311
School and pre-school camps	301	301	357	345	354	354	300	881	993
Touristic halting places	201	297	346	444	502	672	761	1208	1227
Agro-touristic boarding houses	560	735	825	1014	1096	1077	954	1831	1793

Source: www.maramures.insse.ro

The locality that has the highest value of net use index of accommodation capacity is Ocna Şugatag, and this is due to most of the hotels from locality whose index of net use is 41.5%, in other touristic structures the net use index is below 10%.

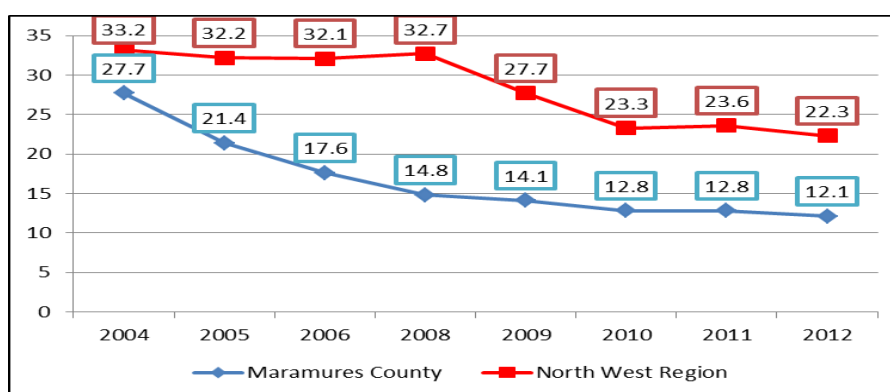


Figure 2. The evolution of the intensive net use index, NV Region and Maramures County

Intensive net use index of accommodation capacity has manifested during the analyzed period, 2004-2012, a lowering trend. In year 2012, the value of the intensive use index is at the North West Region 22.3%, while in the County there is a lower value of only 12.1%. Both values are lower than the national average, 34.3%. Also in 2012, Maramures County recorded the lowest value at the region level.

Structures that have the highest net use index of accommodations capacity are hotels (22.90%). At the opposite pole are situated agrotourist households (4.10%).

The tourist profile of localities from Maramures County differ depending on the types of tourism practiced in the area. For example, the town with the largest tourist accommodation structures is Botiza (31 accommodation units, from witch all of are agrotourist guesthouses), this locality being known for agrotourism.

Analysis of tourist demand in Maramures County

Tourists staying in accommodation units from Maramures County, represents in year 2013, 12.13% from the total number of tourists of the region. The evolution of this indicator is one sinuous, with increases and decreases in the year 2013, being registered with 46.68% more tourists than in 2000.

From total of tourists record in 2013, in Maramures County, 82.07% are Romanian tourists and 17.93% are foreign tourists. The number of Romanian tourists accomodated in Maramures County, in 2013, has increased 39.63%, compared to 2000, while the number of foreign tourists by 5.09%, compared to 2006.

Foreign tourists staying in tourist accomodation structures from Maramures County, represents 13.06% from the total of foreign tourists registered in the North West Region in year 2013.

In Maramures County, the number of tourist accomodated in agrotourist households has increased in the analyzed period, from 247 tourists in 2000 to 12,519 tourists in 2013 (over 50 times). For Romanian tourists the increasing was from 58 tourists in 2000 to 11,180 in 2013 (over 192 times), and among foreign tourists from 1,082 tourists in 2006 to 1339 tourists in 2013 (over 1,2 times).

Tourists accomodated in agrotourist households represents, in year 2013, 16.20% from the total number of tourists accomodated in these accommodation structures, at the North-West region level. From these, 89.3% are Romanian tourist and 19.7% foreign tourists.

Table 4.

Arrivals of tourists in agrotourist households from North West Region

	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
Total										
N-W Region	2052	29173	50452	74305	100558	72666	52321	50506	67434	77267
Bihor	-	740	855	2296	4683	10313	14667	18816	27326	24375
Bistrita-Nasaud	-	438	1003	1038	1561	456	376	634	1526	2730
Cluj	1453	20349	36883	53717	76269	43985	21359	14823	18313	27500
Maramures	247	4195	5215	5537	7715	6659	7785	10114	12324	12519
Satu Mare	322	2967	6002	11081	9493	9511	5717	3501	3960	6431
Salaj	30	484	494	636	837	1742	2417	2618	3985	3712
Romani										
N-W Region	1850	27928	49219	72970	98960	70781	49850	47637	64117	71553
Bihor	-	736	851	2267	4575	9752	13917	17776	25927	22277
Bistrita-Nasaud	-	438	1003	1037	1559	450	375	603	1470	2690
Cluj	1453	20288	36883	53717	76267	43945	21243	14664	17908	25789
Maramures	58	3387	4133	4535	6415	5567	6763	8965	11327	11180
Satu Mare	311	2967	6002	11081	9493	9511	5430	3287	3847	6259
Salaj	28	112	347	333	651	1556	2122	2342	3638	3358
Foreigners										
N-W Region	-	-	1233	1335	1598	1885	2471	2869	3317	5714
Bihor	-	-	4	29	108	561	750	1040	1399	2098
Bistrita-Nasaud	-	-	-	1	2	6	1	31	56	40
Cluj	-	-	-	-	2	40	116	159	405	1711
Maramures	-	-	1082	1002	1300	1092	1022	1149	997	1339
Satu Mare	-	-	-	-	-	-	287	214	113	172
Salaj	-	-	147	303	186	186	295	276	347	354

Source: <https://statistici.insse.ro/shop/>

Overall the analyzed period, in the North West region, there is an increase in the number of overnight stays by 7.80%. This increase is different on a smaller time intervals, alternating with intervals while in which are registered decreases. At the Maramures County the growth is lower, only 3.65%.

In year 2013, the overnight stays in accommodation structures from Maramures County represents, 9.08% from all overnight stays in the region.

If we make an analysis of overnight stays by categories of tourist, depending on the area of origin, it is found that overnight stays of the Romanian tourists are in 2013, 82.13% from the total of the county, the remaining 17.87% being the overnight stays of foreign tourists.

Analysis of overnight stays in agrotourist guesthouses indicates an increasing about 50 times (40.99%) of this indicator, in the analyzed period in Maramures County. In terms of overnight stays among Romanian tourists the increasing is about 146 times, and 1.2 times for foreign tourists.

In year 2013, the overnight stays in agrotourist households from Maramures County, represents 14.62% from total overnight stays recorded at regional level. They consist of 88.64% overnight stays of the Romanian tourists and overnight stays of the foreign tourists 11.36%.

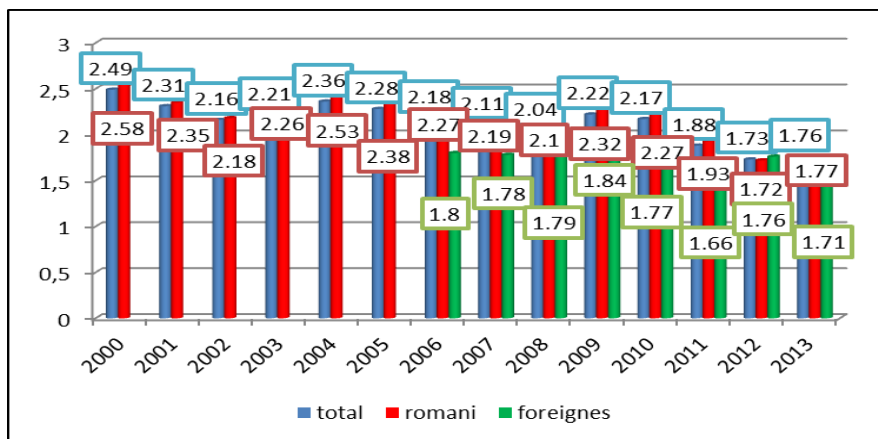


Figure 3. Average length of stay, Maramures County, 2000-2013

The average length of stay in the tourist reception units, at Maramures County level, has fellt from 2.49 days in year 2000 to 1.76 days in year 2013.

The average length of stay of Romanian tourists in year 2013, is 1.77 days, lower from the value of the same indicator in 2000 (2.58 days). This value is superior of the average length of stay of foreign tourists 1.71 days and also lower compared to the value recorded in 2006 (1.8 days).

Compared to the average length of stay recorded in accommodation units from Maramures County, at national and regional level there is a length of stay of tourists higher: 2.9

days in Romania (Romanian stay 3.1 days and 2 3 days foreign tourists) and 2.8 days in Nord-Vest Development Region (2.9 days Romanian tourist and 1.8 days foreign tourists).

The average length of stay recorded in agrotourist guesthouses from the Maramures County, is shown in Figure 4.

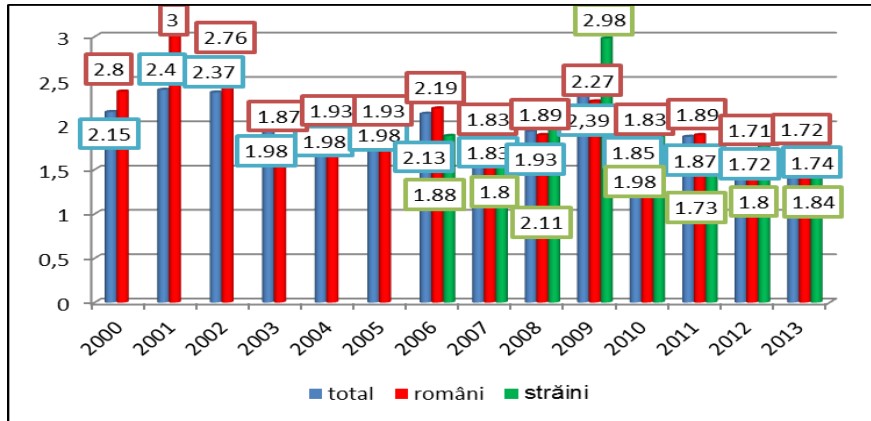


Figure 4. Average length of stay in agrotourist guesthouses from Maramures County, 2000-2013

In general agrotourism activity held in agrotourist guesthouses, the average length of stay decreased from 2.15 days in 2000 to 1.74 days in 2013. The value registered in 2013 is lower than the county average, 1.76 days.

The average length of stay for Romanian tourists staying in agrotourist guesthouses in year 2013, is 1.72 days value below the county average, 1.77 days. In 2000, the same indicator recorded a higher value, 2.38 days.

If case of foreign tourists staying in agrotourist guesthouses from Maramures County, the average length of stay recorded in year 2013, the value of 1.84 days, a higher value compared to the indicator value for both Romanian tourists and travelers all.

In Maramures County, generally, tourist traffic has a maximum mainly during summer, and a secondary maximum in winter.

In some localities the maximums can be reversed, meaning they have a mainly maximum in winter (Borsa Mogoşa, Cavnic, Streams, Botiza, Vadul Izei) and secondary maximum in summer (other localities). In these times of year tourist pressure manifests with intensity.

Regarding foreign tourist flow is more intense in winter, in the winter holidays in localities that host a number of festivals recognized both nationally and internationally, festivals on customs and habits related to winter. Those who visit Maramures, a large number are from Western Europe.

The presence of seasonality in Maramures agrotourism is known, being determined by natural and social factors with varying degrees of intensity, so marketing actions should be given a special attention.

Precise identification of tourist traffic in rural area of Maramures is difficult due to non-declaration of the exact number of tourists and their accomodation in rural households not homologated, in forest lodges or hunting in private secondary housing.

Although it has a reputation in the domestic tourism market, Maramures has a relatively low number of tourists compared to other regions of the country, because it is far away from urban centers emitting tourists (the nearest town being at 120 km, Cluj-Napoca), from here the presence of seasonality (mostly) caused by medium and long stays.

The impact of agrotourism is multidirectional and contradictory, both for rural area as well as local regional branches, the economystudies emphasizing this.

The main positive aspects are economic growth, even though agriculture provides or not the source of living of communities, agrotourism determins creation of new jobs, using of force and rural female occupations, perpetuating crafts, art craft, in a word regional development.

CONCLUSIONS

A detailed analysis of the Romanian tourism offer, indicate the fact that, in our country rural heritage is not sufficiently capitalized and rural tourism product is undergoing crystallization. Also, currently, rural tourism product takes the form of household or rural settlements that provide primary tourism services, offering richness values of Romanian village.

Rural tourism in Maramures has prospects of development, imposing, however, the involvement of public authorities and those from the private sector and consumers of tourism products in the conservation of natural and cultural heritage of Maramures villages, without encouraging modernism that can bring significant changes in preserving the authentic of this region. The tourist infrastructure has a traditional rural note, specific to Maramures, aspect that will still be preserved.

A well planned rural tourism can serve as a strategy for conservation of environment and which can function as a new alternative to the current occupation of free time through various leisure facilities. But rural tourism is characterized as an activity that can negatively influence the development of rural areas, loss of identity through industrialization, changing mentality, attitudes towards architecture and port, adoption patterns modern in everyday life and activities; therefore it is necessary that the development of tourism in rural areas to be planned and managed carefully. Sources and resources of income through tourism are numerous, rural tourism developed in present not capitalize not even a half the potential of Maramures area.

Development of tourism in Maramures is mainly based on existing diversified potential, but depends mainly on its promotional methods used at local and regional level.

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